

## Intercultural Stereotypes: Ethnic Inequality as a System of Social Order in the Soccer Milieu

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Darius Zifonun

## **Intercultural Stereotypes: Ethnic Inequality as a System of Social Order in the Soccer Milieu<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. Soccer, Ethnicity, and Stratification**

Soccer can be described as a world where various systems of social order overlap – moral, ethnic, legal, economic, and that of sports. This paper will focus on the aspect of ethnic inequality as a system of order that permeates other systems of social order. It is concerned with the nature of ethnic differences in the world of soccer. I will argue that those differences are not properly understood strictly along the lines of the horizontal coexistence between different ethnic groups but must be interpreted in terms of a vertical system of stratification. At the heart of the symbolic system of classification in the world of soccer is the stereotype of the ‘more hot-blooded southerner.’ I will explore the stereotype’s connotations of meaning, trace the various ways that it is used in communication, show how it relates to other ethnic attributions, and, finally, describe the socio-structural conditions in which such stereotyping occurs.

Stratification and hierarchical ordering based on performance and success belong to the fundamental principles of soccer as a sport. For the individual player, this may mean being a regular starting player versus coming off the bench, being awarded a highly paid contract versus having to make do with a more modest paycheck. A soccer player’s individual prestige also crucially depends on what is perceived as individual performance. At the team level, winning or losing a match in a very immediate sense signifies a relationship of dominance and subordination. Yet, the categorical distinction between ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ applied here is embedded in a system of ongoing competition in soccer, which, according to its own self-conception as an expression of an ‘achievement-oriented society,’ “knows only gradual and alterable measures of status distribution” (Neckel 2003: 166; translation from German). Over the course of a season, such gradual differences are reflected in a team’s position in the standings. More enduring differences are reflected in whether a team plays in a higher or lower division, although such status differences can also undergo change as a result of promotion or relegation.

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1 Translated by Stephan Elkins (SocioTrans – Social Science Translation & Editing).

Organized soccer is a domain where actors explicitly seek competition, where they deliberately expose themselves to mechanisms of differentiation, and where inequality is institutionalized as a principle of social order.

Migrants who organize as 'ethnic' groups and form 'ethnic' teams in order to participate in organized league play partake in this process of classification in sports. However, this process is not based on criteria of athletic performance alone. When such teams are involved, a second, 'ethnic' component comes into play. When 'ethnic' teams meet other teams, contend to gain ground in the standings, battle over wins and losses, promotion and relegation, they are at the same time engaging in a struggle for social inclusion as an 'ethnic' group. The athletic competition is accompanied by interpretive struggles over social attributions that employ 'ethnic' categories to make sense of the action on and beside the field and establish a symbolic order of inequality (see Weiß 2001).

## 2. Memory, Media, Elites

However, these local encounters are not the original source of ethnic attributions. Rather, they are constructed by social elites, become inscribed in a society's memory, and are disseminated by the media (see Blumer 1958: 6). The belief that 'southerners' are 'hot-blooded' occupies a firm place in the stock of knowledge of Western societies. Edward Said, for instance, has shown that the image of Arabs in Western discourse is shaped by the belief "that there is a 'powerful sexual appetite ... characteristic of those hot-blooded southerners'" (Said 1978: 311). Their characteristic "undifferentiated sexual drive" is the reason for their 'racial' inferiority. The concept of southerner in contemporary soccer discourse in Germany is marked by the fact that it does not refer to a clearly defined group of people. On the contrary, the notion of southerner is a collective term for all of those who do not belong to 'us,' thus drawing a distinction between the in- and outgroup. Franz Beckenbauer, one of soccer's most influential spokespersons in Germany, includes Africans and South Americans in this category (Beckenbauer 2001: 7). According to Beckenbauer, southerners are different from "northerners" in that the former have an "innate litness" and "mastery of the ball." In such attributions, a number of different national stereotypes culminate (see Parr 2003)<sup>2</sup> to which we may add the idea, widely cultivated in soccer, that we can distinguish specific national styles of play (see Eisenberg et al. 2004: 151ff.). The explicitly physical attributes mentioned by Beckenbauer are only one side of the coin in describing

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2 I would like to thank Marion Müller for drawing my attention to the article by Rolf Parr and providing the quote by Franz Beckenbauer.

the nature of 'southerners.' On the other side, we encounter the belief that there exist typical mental dispositions. Günter Netzer, another icon of German soccer, made comments in this vein in a conversation with the journalist Gerhard Delling: "It is the general mentality of the southerner; they tend to overreact in situations when they are provoked" (Netzer 2006 – translation from German).

Beckenbauer's and Netzer's authority as sources of relevant and valid knowledge in soccer affairs derives from their exceptional status acquired in a variety of functions over many years. Franz Beckenbauer was world champion both as a player and as the head coach of the German national team, and, more recently, he was president of the World Cup Organizing Committee in 2006. He was president of FC Bayern Munich, vice president of the German Football Association (DFB), and a columnist for Germany's major tabloid, Bild. Günter Netzer was part of the German national team that won the European Championship in 1972. After his playing career ended, he became the general manager of the club Hamburger SV. In recent years, he has been involved in marketing soccer broadcasting rights and has also been working as a commentator for the German television network ARD since 1996.

Of course, the interpretations offered by elite spokespersons, such as Netzer and Beckenbauer, and disseminated by the media are not carved in stone. On the one hand, they may undergo changes as the media discourse unfolds. Rolf Parr, for instance, has shown how the media-produced stereotypes of national soccer styles changed in the course of the World Cup 2002 (see Parr 2003). On the other hand, everyday actors do not simply adopt those interpretation patterns in the role of passive recipients. Actors actively modify and adapt them to their own interpretation needs. It is to those everyday interpretations that we shall now turn.

### **3. The Stereotype of the 'Hot-Blooded Southerner' in the Wider System of Symbolic Classification**

The stereotype of the 'hot-blooded' southerner plays a particularly prominent role in the 'ethnic' self-perception and social perception of the members of Southern European clubs (this refers to Turks, Spaniards, Greeks, and Portuguese in particular). For instance, when several red cards are issued against players of a Greek team, when a match between two Turkish teams is called off by the referee because the players started a brawl on the field, when fights break out among Turkish spectators after the game, when commenting the large number of yellow-red cards received by a Spanish player in the course of a season, the common explanation given, both by German observers and members of 'ethnic' clubs, is that southerners, by comparison, are '*more* hot-blooded.'

But are we justified in speaking of a stereotype at all in this specific case? The answer might well be no from the perspective of social psychology. Social psychologists typically focus on the negative aspects of attributions, the rigid nature of categorizations, and the factual (statistical) inaccuracy of the characterizations with regard to the respective collective (inaccurate object reference, see Nazarkiewicz 1997: 183).

From a sociology of knowledge perspective, it would seem more appropriate to conceive of a stereotype as a specific kind of type that is distinct from other types in that it is *immune to experience*. Gordon Allport (1979: 191) speaks of a “fixed mark upon the category.” This intends to describe the circumstance that even if the process of classifying an individual characteristic by applying a category associated with a certain group fails, this does not affect the validity of the category; its situational inadequacy or irrelevance in any particular case is either not perceived or dismissed as an exception to the general validity of the classification system. Allport (1979: 23) calls such behavior “re-fencing.” In case of our example, this means that even if a Southern European does not show any signs of being more ‘hot-blooded,’ he is still perceived that way. Or even if a situation could easily be explained without recourse to the ‘hot-blooded’ nature of Southern Europeans, the stereotype is nevertheless applied, or, in case of a ‘cool’ Southern European, he is perceived as being ‘not like the others.’ Thus, stereotypes are different from ordinary types in two ways. In employing stereotypes, the type is confused with the real person (see Luckmann/Luckmann 1983: 62f.); this applies to the individual level: ‘that particular southerner.’ At the same time, the stereotype, as opposed to the type, is firmly entrenched against any perception suggesting the need to correct it (Luckmann/Luckmann 1983: 74); this refers to the collective level: ‘the southerners’ in general. Stereotypes ascribe characteristics that are fixed and invariable in the view of the actor applying them. Nevertheless, stereotypes do indeed change over historical time (although typically behind the backs of the actors), particularly so when the relationship between groups undergoes change. Such change does not necessarily mean that the stereotype as such is drawn into question; for the most part, it is merely individual elements that are modified. *Secondly*, stereotypes and types differ with regard to their *function*. Stereotypes *justify* or *discredit* certain behavior by referring to a given set of fixed characteristics whereas types, as a form of everyday heuristics and a means of predicting behavior, serve as a tentative ‘sense-making aid’ to make behavior predictable but not to justify it (in retrospect). The *third* characteristic aspect of stereotypes lies in their *evaluative connotations*. Stereotypes have moral implications. They attribute moral qualities, such as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ to those targeted by the stereotype (Nazarkiewicz 1997). It is

this evaluative aspect that infuses stereotypical classifications with the dimension of superiority and inferiority.<sup>3</sup>

Whether we face a stereotype or a type, or more precisely, whether a stereotypical form is actually applied as a stereotype in interaction, according to the particular understanding of the concept proposed here, can only be identified by observing its social use in the act of stereotyping (see Nazarkiewicz 1997). We must therefore take a closer look at everyday communication involving stereotypes.

When we do so, we can see that (1) the distinction made is a gradual one ('more hot-blooded' vs. 'less hot-blooded') and not a categorical one ('hot' vs. 'cold'). This suggests some degree of *difference* between the participants in the interaction but not (absolute) *dissimilarity* (see Neckel/Sutterlüty 2005). Whereas in the historical example the characterization 'hot-blooded' pertaining to the category 'southerners' is still unambiguous, and the media discourse also clearly distinguishes between one's own and the 'southern mentality,' in the world of everyday life this distinction loses its sharp contrast and becomes a matter of degree.

Moreover, (2) self-stereotypes and social stereotypes converge – at least partially (see below). The group targeted by stereotyping embraces and describes itself in terms of the same stereotype. This reflects *shared knowledge* about ethnic differences.

(3) Closely related to this is the fact that the stereotype is also communicated in *encounters* between the groups and not only in situations where the stereotyped group is absent.

(4) The difference is described as of a *natural* and not of a social kind. By defining a difference as natural, it is declared invariable and is positioned outside of the social realm.

(5) It gains social relevance and has an immediate impact on social life in that it is viewed as *causing certain types of social behavior*. In our case, the stereotype serves to scandalize the purportedly greater degree of deviance among 'southerners' from the moral order governing the world of soccer. The allegedly greater levels of aggressiveness, dishonesty, and cheating need not be substantiated by evidence but are considered a fact that derives from the 'southerners' natural

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3 My emphasis here is on moral disparagement that implies the inferiority of the person or group targeted by stereotyping. But the reverse case of moral enhancement and stereotypes implying superiority is possible just as well. For instance, in sports in the U.S.A. it is quite common to classify African-American athletes as physically superior – a case of positive stereotyping. Discursively mixed in with the positive stereotype, however, are images of spiritual and moral depravity (see Hartmann 2002: 409f.).

dispositions. Claims of moral failings are not only raised by Germans but, in debates about 'ethnic' clubs, also by migrants who are opposed to forms of organizing along 'ethnic' lines in soccer. At the same time, it is particularly the representatives of such clubs that justify morally dubious behavior by referring to natural causes that are in their blood: "We Southern Europeans are more hot-blooded."

Other members of ethnic clubs refuse to embrace the stigma. (6) They reject the claim – and some do so vehemently – of being 'more hot-blooded' and for this reason to a greater degree morally deviant and emphasize the potentially harmful effects of the stereotype. For instance, they point out that the belief that 'southerners' are 'more hot-blooded' and thus more aggressive may motivate German referees to more harshly penalize a player of 'southern' descent than a German player. This reaction shows that protecting against the stereotype may trigger *counter-stigmatization* by accusing Germans of racism. Demanding that "all must be treated equal" invokes rules of fairness while implying that the other party falls short on those terms.

(7) Moreover, we can observe that both the German and the 'ethnic' side also apply the stereotype in a *playful or ironic manner*. This observation indicates that the speaker cannot escape the persistent force of the stereotype while, at the same time, the person is unable to communicate its moral connotations in a taken-for-granted fashion.

(8) However, the stereotype of the 'more hot-blooded southerner' is by far not the only ethnic pattern of interpretation that thrives in the world of soccer. There are other attributions of behavior, such as 'they keep to themselves,' 'they always stick together,' and so on, that are not covered by the stereotype 'more hot-blooded.' They refer to *more general ethnic cultural differences* that are perceived by the German side only. In the German view, the cultural differences and sense of ethnic community referred to in this way are considered problematic and attract criticism.

(9) Furthermore, players and spectators of Turkish 'ethnic' teams are subject to *racism as a worldview*. This worldview provides those who share it with a key to making sense of and understanding the world. It is tacit knowledge and, as such, guides action and provides a seemingly 'natural' source of 'automatic' racist behavior. Especially at matches in rural areas, the players of "Turkish" teams face a totally alien universe composed of various ingredients: the ways in which the 'hosts' give them meaningful looks, drop subtle hints, and indulge in 'uncontrolled' outbursts of racist insults.

And finally, (10) we observe the widespread deliberate use of racism based on a *racist ideology* (see Taguieff 2001). As opposed to a racist worldview, ideological

racism does not directly guide action. It is a means of justifying racist behavior from the reflexive perspective of a distant observer. It is deliberately employed to motivate behavior – whether one’s own or that of others. On the playing field, German players engage in racist stereotyping and use insulting language (“*Scheiß Türke*” [fucking Turks], “*Kümmeltürke*,”<sup>4</sup> etc.) Those verbal insults aim at provoking ‘Turkish’ players and rest on the assumption that they respond very sensitively to injury to their honor. The players targeted by such verbal assaults are expected to respond either by engaging in some form of violent conduct and being expelled from the field or by losing their focus on the match.

#### 4. Status Struggles and Status Ambivalence in the Soccer Milieu

How then can we explain this kind of stereotyping? The key to the explanation we are looking for is found in the *social context* in which such communication takes place. The communication of stereotypes does not float freely and does not occur by chance. Whenever images congeal into stable and enduring stereotypes, they are anchored in a social structure with which they interact. In the case of the urban soccer milieu, we face the following socio-structural configuration:<sup>5</sup> A defining feature of the milieu is the fact that there are regularly recurring encounters between the participating groups, which provide the setting for forming those groups in the first place. In addition, the world of soccer is characterized by shifting memberships. A ‘southerner’ on the opposing team today may become a player of one’s own team tomorrow. The team’s success therefore may soon depend on his cooperation. Another characteristic feature is overlapping memberships in the subworlds of the milieu. For instance, members of the ‘southerners’ clubs are at the same time also referees and, as such, members of the Referee Association. The successful pursuit of the activities at the core of the social world thus rests on an edifice of mutual dependency. For a team to be able to play, it has to rely on the other team, whether ‘ethnic’ or ‘German,’ actually being present on Sunday at game is time. Moreover, the ‘German’ clubs also depend on immigrants internally. Many clubs would have difficulty putting together a team were it not for players with a migration background. And finally, the ‘ethnic’ clubs and players also play an important role in the sports associations (and at the municipal level). Without

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4 *Kümmeltürke* literally translates as ‘caraway Turk,’ which is a racist insult in Germany against the Turkish immigrant population.

5 For a theoretical discussion of the usefulness of the ‘milieu’-concept in diversity studies see Zifonun 2015a.



the 'southerners,' there would be no organized league play. Another characteristic is that immigrants assume prestigious positions in the milieu. They are successful athletes and important players of their teams. 'Ethnic' teams are successful, advance to the higher leagues, win trophies and championships. Ultimately, their fairly strong resource base, the status they have achieved over the years, their familiarity with the formal and informal rules of the milieu have put the 'outsiders' in a position to defend themselves in crisis situations. Counter-stereotyping has already been mentioned, but they also do not shy away from using the courts in case of conflict.

This structural constellation corresponds with a set of different *relationships* that shape the coexistence between migrant 'southerners' and Germans.

(1) In the German view, the 'southerners' are perceived as competitors, who, upon entering the scene, are responded to by social closure. Max Weber pointed out the following: "Usually one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors-race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc.-as a pretext for attempting their exclusion. It does not matter which characteristic is chosen in the individual case: whatever suggests itself most easily is seized upon" (Weber 1968: 342). The limited number of positions on a team, the small chances of winning a championship or advancing to a higher division fuel an interest in barring competitors from entering the contest.

(2) On the other hand, the competitors are at the same time (potential) colleagues. Weber also argued that whenever the parties involved expect a social relationship to improve their situation, we can expect an open relationship instead of closure (see Weber 1968: 43). In this situation, the alien other moves closer and assumes positions that are incompatible with ethnic inferiority and subordination.

(3) Besides, migrants cannot be formally excluded from the soccer milieu without due reason. Migrants can claim their right of access, demand inclusion, and thus force contact.

This configuration of ambivalent relationships and structural conditions provides the framework for explaining the various modes of social exclusion of migrant 'southerners' described above and the contradictory forms of classification in intercultural communication. Newcomers to the milieu who advance into positions formerly occupied by others face typical reactions, the basic characteristics of which Everett Hughes already described in 1945. It is of major significance in this respect that racial or ethnic affiliation is institutionalized as a *master status*

in modern societies (Hughes 1971: 147).<sup>6</sup> Ethnicity thus suggests itself as an immediate, unreflected reference point for everyday actors. Being a 'southerner' supersedes the other dimensions of difference that exist in everyday life. This differentness, which is perceived to be a fundamental one, may be *spelled out differently depending on the situation*.

The most extreme form of inequality in soccer is being (*permanently*) *excluded from organized play*. Being denied access to competition means not being able to participate in the classification struggles and being denied recognition as a competitor. The one excluded from the contest where differences are marked cannot even lose. Social closure, for instance, in the form of refusing to play against ethnic teams or to admit 'southerners' to one's own team, is discursively justified by invoking categorical distinctions of the kind that a 'Turkish' team's style of play has 'nothing to do with soccer' and is more like 'street fighting.'

In cases where there are no attempts at exclusion but the *terms of inclusion* are *negotiated*, migrants must prove themselves. They are subjected to 'admittance tests,' which take the form of a "sparring match of social gestures" (Hughes 1971: 146). The newcomers must accept and master provocations, take fouls without retaliating, and be able to engage in conflict and also make peace again. The key issue in these kinds of symbolic confrontations is avoiding escalation: If migrants take the battle too seriously, they are disqualified and denied access. In the case of 'southerners,' however, inclusion always remains precarious due to the master status of 'race' dominating all other attributes. Especially in the world of soccer where conflict is institutionalized as a permanent process, the admittance test turns into a *never-ending test*, requiring that the other prove himself anew during each encounter. Social inclusion can be revoked at any time, turning the 'sports buddy' back into a 'foreigner.'<sup>7</sup> The individual 'southerner' may gain admittance to the 'informal brotherhood' (Hughes 1971: 146), the 'southerner' as such cannot. In the same vein, the demand, regularly raised by the German side, that foreigners must integrate implies that they are not integrated, emphasizing the existence of differentness and cementing the others' status as outsiders deviating from the norm.

The various modes of classification share a common foundation in that they agree in their assessment of the status of Germans and migrant 'southerners' in

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6 I cannot go into detail here regarding the different usages of the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity.' Cornell/Hartmann 2007 provide an overview.

7 In the case of the Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, Gamal Abdel-Shehid (2005) has demonstrated how his status shifted from 'Canadian hero' to 'Jamaican immigrant' once he was found guilty of doping.

relation to one another. This status assessment assigns immigrants a *subordinate position* while implying a sense of immigrants representing a *threat* to the established order between the groups (see Blumer 1958: 4f.). This sense of threat is fueled not only by the 'objective' and observable ascent of immigrants up the ladder of athletic success in the world of soccer but also by the collectively shared perception of growing numbers of 'southerners' in the soccer milieu along with increasing ethnic self-identification and group formation. Stereotyping is a characteristic response when groups fear that the established status system is in danger. When outsiders actually make inroads into higher status positions, this does not end stereotyping but merely leads to modifying its form. The social advancement of a group that, due to its master status, is 'normally' assigned a subordinate position at the lower end of the social order creates a *status dilemma*, which all groups involved have to deal with (see Hughes 1971: 147).

In this sense, the shift towards a more gradual classification of degrees of 'hot-bloodedness' along with the modes of playing with the stereotype and using it in an ironic and distanced manner can be interpreted as *strategies of coping with ambivalent status positions* both by the dominant and subordinate group. In a situation where the group targeted by the stereotype is not in a position to stop the process of social attribution or escape its effects, the active appropriation and ironic reinterpretation of the stereotype serves as a means of coming to terms with stigmatization without simply succumbing to it. It is a strategy that allows for an existence 'in the shadow of' the stigma, hidden and protected from having to accept and identify with social attributions.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this does not affect the structural persistence of symbolic inequality in the milieu. A simple sign for this asymmetry is the absence of a comparably strong and widely shared stereotype like 'hot-blooded southerner' for Germans. Situations of counter-stigmatization are quickly interpreted as evidence that 'southerners' are overly sensitive, tend to overreact, and cannot take a joke: they fail the admittance test.

Situations are rare where the "*mutual stigmatization games*" (Neckel 2003: 165) are played on equal terms, where all groups involved share the same rights and play according to the same rules. Inclusion is granted on the condition that the established asymmetrical social order remains in place.

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8 What in this specific case is described as a characteristic response by marginalized groups subject to stereotyping is actually a general phenomenon. While no one can escape role expectations and role-taking, this does not require fully embracing a role but allows for maintaining "role distance" (see Goffman 1961; for a discussion of role distance with regard to 'sociological ambivalence,' see Coser 1966).

Another response to the status dilemma is the formation of *segregated sub-worlds* (see Hughes 1971: 149). Social segregation and marginalization reduce the frequency and intensity of 'inter-ethnic' contact and thus serve to contain the severity of the problem. At the same time, self-organization in an ethnic milieu allows members of 'ethnic' clubs to enact their own effective provocation and stigmatization games. The following example shall serve to illustrate this.

A number of fans attend an away game of their team FC Hochstätt Türkspor. Apart from a few older men, there is a group of about 20 young men, who stand out for their well-groomed appearance and stylish dress. They all have their hair styled with gel and wear jeans along with other casual clothes and sports shoes, which are clearly mostly brand-name products. Overall, there are more fans of the visiting team attending the match than of the home team FV 03 Ladenburg. The young Turks, some of whom are players of the second team, had already attracted attention at FC Hochstätt's last home game against SV Schriesheim by their conspicuous behavior. They positioned themselves behind the visitors bench and mimicked the comments and instructions of Schriesheim's head coach ("Let's go!", "It's our turn now," "Line up!") in an ironic tone, making fun of him. At the match against Ladenburg, they vary this behavior. Unlike the older Hochstätt fans, they stand directly behind the home team fans, echoing their shouts and cheers. One Ladenburg spectator, in particular, gets extremely upset. His face turns red with anger, and he constantly turns around casting glances filled with annoyance at the group. He is also the one who is most engaged in frequently shouting 'instructions' to 'his' team, such as "move up," "play forward," "play the ball to Florian." He cheers for his team in free kick and corner situations and complains about the referee and his assistants. The Hochstätt fans mimic his words while exaggerating his dialect, also in later situations where those comments and instructions are out of place. The youths derive great enjoyment from this behavior, which they express in frequent bursts of laughter. In response to their behavior, the bystanding Ladenburg spectators try talking to them about the fouls committed by the Turkish team and the wrong decisions by the referees. The group does not respond to the dialogue offered but merely continues to mimic the Ladenburg fans, now applying the mimicry to comment their own team in the respective situations. As the youths again pretend to be upset over a foul committed by a Ladenburg player, another, elderly spectator, casually dressed and obviously very angry, turns around and snaps at them: "Y'all back there oughta be gassed" – a statement that is not echoed by the young Turks.

The game that the Turkish youths are playing in this situation is not reserved for 'interethnic' conflict alone. Symbolically provoking the other is typical behavior

in the soccer milieu and is frequently observed even among the members of the same club. Such provocation games are also common behavior among young Turks (see Schiffauer 1983). In this setting, however, young Turks are playing this game with older Germans, which is peculiar since the latter do not actually qualify as proper opponents. Accordingly, the Germans refuse to play the game, demand it be ended, and simply do not want to be bothered. In this situation, the young Turks are violating the rules of the soccer milieu. In showcasing their ability to mimic the other, they are demonstrating their superior cultural competence ('You can't even speak proper German' (i.e. High German), 'You are hillbillies,' 'We know your talk; we don't talk to you; we make fun of you; we are esthetically and culturally superior, just as the soccer culture of our players is superior'). The young Turks employ ethnicity as a resource in this game. "Gassing" then is the symbolic-communicative response – an 'ethnic' response to an ethnic provocation.

*Open racism* and *explicitly moralizing* against 'foreigners' are rarely observed in the soccer milieu. Restraint in this respect is motivated by fear of being accused of racism. Accusations of moral delinquency are typically directed at a specific addressee (the members of a certain 'Turkish' club) and are not explicitly derived by associating the accused with a certain category (the 'Turks'). Restraint is also motivated by an awareness of being dependent on the other. Whenever open racism emerges, it evokes outrage and is frequently answered by counter-stigmatization ('Nazi,' 'hillbilly').

The last kind of response to the status dilemma that I would like to mention here takes the form of immigrants in *formal organizations* being assigned to positions where they are *put in charge of matters concerning their own kind* (see Hughes 1971: 149). For instance, 'southerners' are generally largely absent from the bodies of the German Football Association and its subdivisions. If there are any at all, they are usually assigned the position of 'commissioner for integration affairs,' as in the case of Berlin's soccer association or, more recently, on the DFB's Board of Directors (as an advisory member).

To sum up, we cannot identify any linear path of development when looking at the changes in the symbolic classifications that pervade the world of soccer. Today, it is more so that there exist various patterns for constructing symbolic inequality, which are brought to bear depending on the situation. Neither does the fact that the stereotypes are also widely shared among the population targeted affect the asymmetrical nature of intercultural relationships.<sup>9</sup> 'Ethnic minorities'

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9 With regard to the asymmetry of classifications between African and European Americans, Michèle Lamont (2000: 95f.) pointed out that African Americans not only do

are always perceived through the lens of the majority and appear as an anomaly since they are always defined in ethnic terms. By contrast, the German population remains ethnically invisible – with the exception of situations involving ethnic counter-stigmatization.<sup>10</sup> Members of the majority population are not perceived along ethnic lines; rather, differences are described in terms of individual, socio-structural, or lifestyle-related attributes.<sup>11</sup>

Communication of stereotypes and symbolic classification take a different shape within and between the milieus of the soccer world. *Insiders* use their social position to impose classifications with hierarchical implications on *outsiders* in order to justify their social dominance. The outsiders' capacity to guard against stigmatization and establish negative classifications of their own is at the same time an important prerequisite for their own ability to climb the social ladder successfully. Stereotyping can be understood as symbolic struggles for recognition and for denying it. An environment where the established group becomes aware of being dependent on the outsiders, where upward and downward mobility begin to shake social hierarchies, where social ascent can no longer be qualified as an exception to the rule, where social hierarchies have nevertheless not fully eroded and continue to exert considerable influence, provides the breeding ground for ambivalent classifications to thrive, such as the 'more hot-blooded Southern European.' The shared stereotype flourishes in conditions where the two groups are both potentially and actually relevant to one another, interact on a fairly regular basis, and show some degree of social and personal proximity while each group maintains its own forms of ethnic and cultural organization and upholds its self-perception as being different from the other.

In such conditions, which are typical for the urban amateur soccer milieu, shared stereotypes, such as the 'more hot-blooded southerner,' serve to establish and maintain stable images of the self and the other as well as clear 'ethnic' boundaries. They serve as suitable media for governing intercultural relationships

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not command the same means of disseminating their attributions but have also often internalized the negative social attributions by others.

10 For the American 'hidden ethnicity' debate, see Doane 1997.

11 "In categorizing other people – identifying them as an ethnic or racial group, for example – we emphasize what we see as the similarities among 'them' and their differences from 'us.' In addition, there is a good deal of evidence, for example, that people tend to assume that more homogeneity exists in out-groups (those of which they are not members) than in in-groups (those of which they are members), stereotyping the 'other,' while remaining attuned to the subtle differences among themselves" (Cornell/Hartmann 2007: 218).

precisely because their meanings leave room for interpretation and allow for a wide range of usages.<sup>12</sup> This form of drawing boundaries facilitates communicative understanding, especially under conditions demanding political correctness: There seems to be no derogatory element involved in taking recourse to a stereotype describing human 'nature' and natural temperament. Moreover, the stereotype has largely lost its original sexual implications in the soccer milieu: being referred to as 'hot' no longer has sexual or negative connotations. To the contrary, during the World Cup 2006, the German national coach, Jürgen Klinsmann, emphasized how "*geil*" his team was – *geil* literally means horny in English but in this context is a colloquial expression that might be best translated as 'fantastic,' although the term has not lost its sexual connotations. Bild, a major German tabloid, embraced this expression in its World Cup coverage and coined the slogan "*schwarz, rot, geil!*" which alludes to the colors of the German flag – black, red, and gold

### 5. Communication Breakdown or a Communicative Process of Cementing Inequality?

The soccer milieu is a social world in its own right. Its members share a special stock of knowledge, which is relevant only to them and only while participating in this particular world. This special knowledge allows governing interaction specific to that milieu. How to throw the ball in correctly, behave properly as a spectator, and conduct oneself in dealing with referees do not fall into the category of general knowledge widely shared throughout society; yet it is common knowledge among the members of the soccer world.

Some of this knowledge exists in alternative versions. There are, for instance, different fan cultures, types of referees, and styles of play. In the large domain of amateur soccer, particularly the 'ethnic' differentiation of knowledge plays a considerable role.<sup>13</sup>

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12 The reason for the impossibility of pinpointing one definite meaning lies not in inadequate hermeneutic interpretation but in the very nature of stereotyping: it is ambiguous – and this precisely accounts for its cultural significance. Likewise, it is just as impossible to definitely determine whether ethnic self-organization has more integrative or segregative effects. Migrants live with such tensions and ambiguity. It is more of a shortcoming on part of sociological analyses to insist on precisely determining these phenomena one way or the other. Immigrants face ambiguous social conditions, and this is reflected in their social practice and cultural expressions.

13 Examples of 'ethnic' versions of general knowledge are the 'Turkish' concepts of 'arkadaşlık' und 'kabadayı' described in Zifonun 2015b.

Here I have shown that the emergence of ethnic versions of knowledge depends on the emergence of shared general knowledge, in the form of shared stereotypes and symbolic classifications, extending beyond the boundaries of the social subworlds and adding a dimension of vertical stratification to the horizontal differentiation in the soccer milieu. In their book *The Structures of the Life-World*, Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, whose theoretical premises inform these considerations, give an account, which does not appear to fit in with the observations in the case we have just discussed. Toward the end of the chapter *The Structure of the Social Stock of Knowledge* they write:

“The differentiation of ‘versions’ of general knowledge can, given certain socio-historical presuppositions, progress to the point where broad provinces of general knowledge finally become the special property of social groups, classes, etc., often in the form of ‘ideologies.’ If, in a borderline case, the province of general knowledge and common relevances shrinks beyond a critical point, communication within the society is barely possible. There emerge ‘societies within societies.’” (Schütz/Luckmann 1974: 318).

According to Schütz and Luckmann, such differentiation of knowledge occurs particularly in “modern industrial societies” (Schütz/Luckmann 1974: 318).<sup>14</sup> The quotation marks enclosing ‘societies within society’ indicate that the authors themselves were not quite satisfied with this wording. Hence, we can think of this paragraph as pointing to an unsolved problem in theoretically conceptualizing a specific social constellation, which the authors have left to the readers to figure out.

Let us once again turn to the soccer milieu from this angle of sociological theory. Soccer is a “rule-based combat sport” (Bröskamp 1998: 54 – translation from German), which is characterized by a mixture of competition, on the one hand, and cooperation and a consensus about rules, on the other. It involves a high degree of mobility between subgroups, both of the horizontal, e.g. players switching teams, and the vertical kind, i.e. through wins and losses, promotion and relegation. Group affiliation can be ended while belonging to a certain milieu is only partial membership in the first place since members of a milieu are always participants in other social worlds as well (which have their own structures of relevance). Furthermore, the world of soccer, to a significant degree, is a world of observation, presentation, and communication (or a world of gossip, if you will).

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14 Schütz and Luckmann above all had the differentiation between laypersons and experts in mind and thus stratification as a consequence of the progressive division of labor (see Schütz/Luckmann 1974: 323, 326, 327f.) and not ethnic communities, subcultures, scenes, etc.



These findings correspond with the results of more recent studies of other social worlds (or 'small life-worlds'), even in cases that are not specifically concerned with the relationship between the immigrant and native population. However, we must distinguish two types of social worlds: social worlds whose members are indifferent toward and thus separate themselves from the rest of the world and social worlds, like the soccer milieu, that provide the members of a society with *arenas* for encounters and orderly engagement in conflict. In societies offering such arenas, social differentiation entails neither segmentation as described by Schütz and Luckmann nor communication breakdown.

In those arenas, conflict becomes a permanent process but is channeled within the bounds of a common framework: it is institutionalized, shows certain patterns of regularity, is predictable, and is dealt with in a routine and ritualized fashion. At the same time, the unequal relationship between the migrant 'southerners' and the native population is negotiated and determined in such conflict.

Schütz and Luckmann point out that societies seek to resolve the described problem of social segmentation (of knowledge) "by creating highly specialized institutions of transmission." These institutions – for instance schools or the military – are supposed to achieve "an 'equal' transmission of the essential provinces of the common good and to guarantee the 'same' access to different provinces of special knowledge" (Schütz/Luckmann 1974: 318). Much evidence suggests that it is not (primarily) such specialized and coercive institutions created by the state but self-organized worlds based on voluntary association (i.e. 'arenas') that bring forth – in potentially conflictual confrontations between members of symbolically separated, specialized social worlds – something that, although not 'general knowledge,' we might call 'shared knowledge.' The results presented here indicate that multiple, shifting, and part-time memberships in different 'social worlds' and 'subworlds' undermine the authoritative nature of such special knowledge and nourish the emergence of shared knowledge.

In societies in which intercultural encounters in many areas are a common experience, it is difficult to clearly assign people to a particular group occupying a specific position in a hierarchical social order that can claim validity for society as a whole. The research findings of this and other studies can be interpreted as an indication that the analysis must take into account to a greater extent the 'web of group affiliations' (Simmel 1955).

In analyzing the soccer milieu, I have drawn on some elements from the conceptual repertoire developed in the sociology of knowledge in the tradition of Schütz and Luckmann. I have replaced the notion of 'small life-worlds' (see Hitzler/Honer 1984; Honer 1999; Luckmann 1978) with Strauss's concept of 'social

worlds' (see Strauss 1978; Zifonun 2015a) and 'milieu' to underscore the fact that Strauss's approach is a closely related research perspective. This conceptual repertoire appears to be well-suited for the analysis of contemporary pluralist societies. Yet, so far, it has been primarily discussed with an eye to basic theoretical and methodological issues. The existing case studies are mostly perceived as offering no more than micro-sociological analyses of marginal or bizarre milieus. The theoretical potential of a sociology of social worlds and milieus has yet to be debated (but see Hitzler 1999 and Zifonun 2015a). The conceptual schemes that have been developed around the key concepts 'social worlds' and 'small life-worlds' appear to be quite promising for theorizing on the 'shaken systems of knowledge' (see Nazarkiewicz 1997: 198) of contemporary societies, their systems of social order, structures of inequality, and distribution of knowledge.

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